

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

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ONE DOLLAR



Editor's Page

O.K. Hunting season is still four months away. It's not close enough to start cluttering our desks with hunting catalogs and losing ourselves in the woods in the afternoons. No, this is the one time of year that we tend to take note of things happening around us. We look around, and say, "So, this is what the real world is like."

The bad news is that we've been slipping. The public is taking advantage of our good nature and absent-mindedness, and it's embarrassing. And, what's worse, it's all our fault. While we have been out joking and telling stories on the river or in the woods, cleaning our guns and training our dogs, the rest of the world has been busy looking for a scapegoat for environmental problems. And, because we're never much there to defend ourselves, we are an easy shoulder to heave some responsibility on. Here we are, paying our hunting and license fees and taxing *ourselves* to guarantee the health of wildlife populations, and justifiably believing that our actions should speak louder than our words. But, the rest of the public more often than not doesn't even acknowledge our good works.

Take an article I read in a national conservation magazine a few weeks ago. They were talking about the restoration of America's wildlife, and didn't mention even one time the contribution of hunters and fishermen. It's hard to believe that we were simply ignored. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was mentioned, as were "state and federal agencies," but what about us? What about the hunters and trappers and fishermen whose license fees were the sole reasons that these "state agencies" responsible for the management of wildlife populations existed?

This is reality, folks. It is getting worse, but there's no sense in crying over the injustice of it all. Let's face it, we *are* a sensible target to the uninformed. We kill animals. And to those



who feel comfortable with simple answers, our sport is an evil one.

Well, and we've all heard that before. Every couple months or so, someone will sound the alarm in a magazine or newspaper, and we'll discuss the issue amongst ourselves. More often than not, we'll agree that we must clean up our act, try to *look* more civilized or act more sportsman-like, and police our ranks more aggressively.

Now, I'm not saying that plan of action is a bad one. I'm just wondering if we shouldn't lean on a little history at the same time. The undisputable truth is that we *deserve* a pat on the back for singlehandedly pulling wildlife from extinction 50 years ago. In 1937, we hunters decided, no, *demanded* that we be taxed in order to restore wildlife populations throughout the United States. With the passage of the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937, hunters dug into their own pockets to save the wildlife they knew were in desperate trouble.

And the curious thing about this was that they didn't go to the federal government asking for handouts in the midst of the most terrible economic depression this country has ever

endured. No, they simply took the responsibility for the perpetuation of wildlife into their own hands, even though they realized at the time that habitat destruction and pollution together were more devastating on wildlife populations than their own sports, a fact they deduced easily, since hunting and fishing had already been regulated for some time in each state. Still, the hunters, trappers and fishermen didn't stand around wondering who they could blame and get to foot the bill. Nope, they figured that the only way to save that which they loved more than themselves was to do something about it. And *that* is why we have white-tailed deer nibbling on our apple trees, and black bear in our bee hives, and beavers cutting down dogwoods and countless other wildlife species to enjoy in our state. That's right, blame abundant wildlife populations on us. We love it.

But, you know what the ironic thing is? Most of this history has been forgotten. And that's where we should hang our heads in shame. Because even if we can't change someone's mind about whether or not we are "murderers," we *do* have a responsibility to provide them with the truth and then let the chips fall where they may.

There were a whole lot of men in the 1930s and 40s who gave their hearts and souls to the conservation of wildlife at a time when it was not "trendy" or politically sound. They didn't wait until the democratic process groaned into action. They didn't wait for others to solve their problems for them. They went ahead, dug in, and saved the wildlife of this country. Perhaps we've let them down because we've been too busy enjoying that which they worked so hard for, and it's hard to get all worked up about some ignorant folks who don't know the truth about us.

But it just might be about time we lived up to our reputation, took charge of our fate, and collected on the credit we deserve.



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Brown pelican preening; photo by Rob Simpson.

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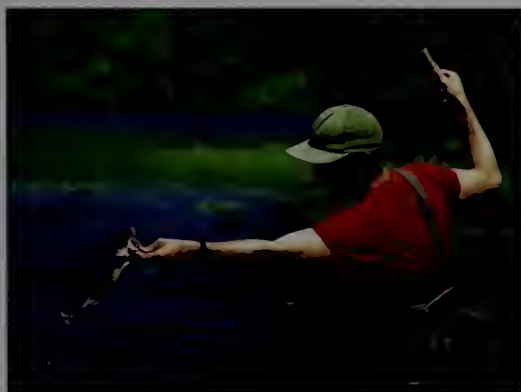
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by C. H. "Kit" Shaffer

Summer Tonic for Turkey Hunters

There are ways to cure
the turkey hunting
between-seasons blues.
It just takes some
imagination.

Some of my turkeyholic hunting buddies here in the Old Dominion are often bored with life. They complain that there is nothing to do between the spring and fall turkey seasons. Obviously, they have not developed any hobbies or interests except pursuing those evasive wild turkeys.

Actually though, there are a number of interesting turkey-related activities that could help us to pass the time between those periods when all hunting seasons are closed. The following are some suggestions which should help bored sportspersons utilize the

off-season months more efficiently. Hopefully, some of these ideas also will result in producing more satisfied and successful hunters:

1. Take plenty of time to carefully pattern your gun: it is amazing how many turkey hunters, when questioned, will sheepishly admit that they have never patterned their favorite firearm with different-sized shot. It is a well-known fact that certain guns throw a different pattern of shot with different loads, but too few individuals bother to thoroughly test their fire-

arms. If the truth were known, untold numbers of those devastating misses and cripples would be eliminated should all turkey enthusiasts take the time to more accurately learn to estimate distances and to recognize the killing ranges of their guns.

2. Keep in good physical shape by exercising regularly. Many of my hunting companions allow themselves to go to pot during the off-season. It usually takes them a month during hunting season of rigorous walking and climbing to get their bodies into shape. Tennis, golf (without the cart), cycling, jogging, swimming or hiking are recom-





Becoming proficient at a variety of turkey calls during the off-season will increase your chances of bringing a bird in during the spring, or calling back birds in the fall; photo by Janet Shaffer.

mended. The best exercises, of course, are those "push-ups" away from the table.

3. Scout new territory for future hunting trips. Should you be fortunate enough to have public hunting land in your area, obtain maps and reconnoiter the potential turkey hunting territory. Walk the newly discovered tracts, searching for the tracks and scratchings which indicate wild turkey utilization. In Virginia, commercial or corporate land is often available to hunters for an annual permit fee. Their offices usually are very cooperative and will provide you with maps and access information.

4. The off-season should provide excellent opportunities to cultivate friendships with farmers and other private landowners who own property which supports wild turkey populations. Don't wait until the opening day of hunting season to make the contacts and to obtain permits. Since farmers are always busy harvesting their crops during the late summer, why not volunteer to help him during your off-days and establish a friendship early?

5. Should there be a public wildlife management area in your territory, you could volunteer to assist the game manager or other personnel in planting food patches for food-producing shrubs or trees.

6. Join a sportsmen's organization which is active and dedicated to conserving our natural resources. You might consider providing the leadership to form a local chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation. An organization composed of friends, acquaintances and fellow turkey hunters can offer many opportunities for good wholesome fellowship between hunting seasons. Some suggestions for interesting programs would include guest speakers, movies, slides, turkey shoots, calling contests or panels of local enthusiasts discussing some phase of turkey hunting or management.

7. The off-seasons are excellent times to yard break and train your turkey dog. Training an affectionate bird dog puppy can be one of the most rewarding of outdoor experiences.

8. Read magazines and books dedicated to wild turkey management and

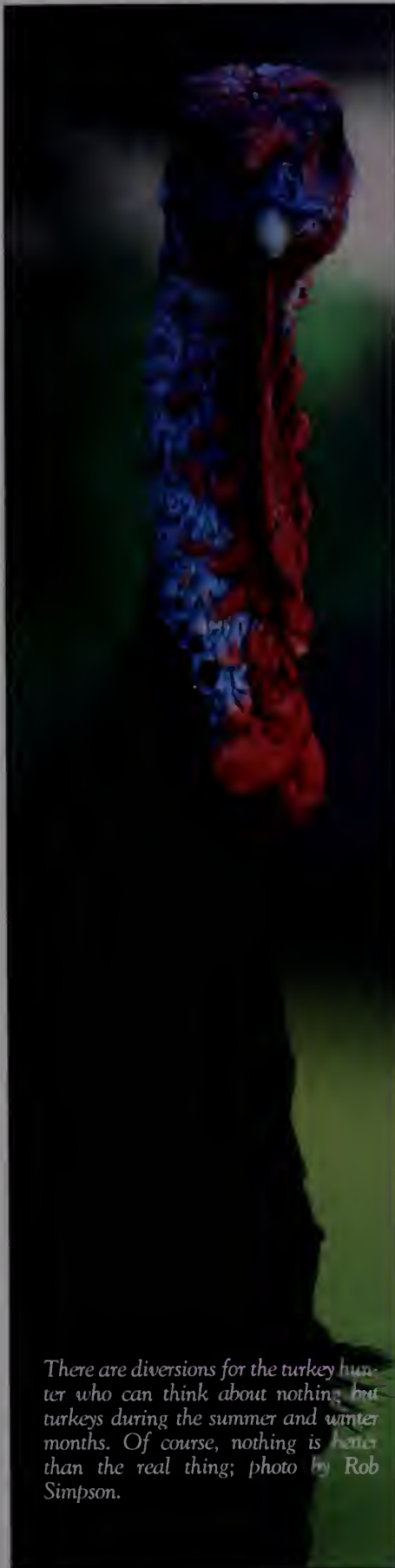
hunting. This is an entertaining way to spend a delightful evening away from the tube. It is always exciting to read about experiences of fellow turkey hunters from around the nation. It is surprising how many new ideas and techniques you will learn to practice on those wily old gobblers by the time that next hunting season rolls around.

9. Practice your calling techniques with different type callers. It is obvious that many wild turkey devotees *do* now spend considerable time listening to tapes and learning the various words in a turkey's vocabulary. It appears that there are thousands of outstanding human callers out there in the bushes that sound better than most real turkeys. Keep up the practice.

10. That time between turkey seasons is an excellent period to inspect and take inventory of your hunting gear. Check your clothing, boots, guns, callers and other essential equipment which you need to carry on your affair with those elusive wild turkeys. Visit your friendly sporting goods stores, peruse hunting magazines and check catalogues to replace worn-out equipment and to purchase new products.

11. Scout for those springtime gobblers before the season begins. Bearded turkey seasons are always set long after the old boys have started gobbling and mating. If you are ambitious and don't like to sleep, there is usually a two to three week period when you can carry out your daybreak searching to locate those serenading tom turkeys. Hopefully the gobblers will be in the same territory when the season opens.

12. Throughout the late summer and early autumn, start driving around the countryside scanning the fields for flocks of wild turkeys. At that time of the year, the gangs of young birds can frequently be observed feeding on grasshoppers, waste grains, crickets, green vegetation and various seeds. Your observations will give you information on the success or failure of the spring nesting season and reward you with a preview as to how plentiful the large black birds might be whenever the season arrives. Be certain to contact farmer friends, rural mail carriers and forest workers to ascertain their



There are diversions for the turkey hunter who can think about nothing but turkeys during the summer and winter months. Of course, nothing is better than the real thing; photo by Rob Simpson.

observations on gangs of young turkeys. By systematically scouting your hunting territories early, you will get a jump on your competitors.

13. The late summer and early fall period is also the best time to appraise the available food supply which may or may not have been produced during the growing season. In our areas, we always check the beech, white oak, red oak, dogwoods and grapes first. These all rank high on the preferred food lists of our beloved wild turkeys. By maintaining a mental inventory of the vegetation in your favorite hunting areas, and then matching the data you have discovered regarding the status of the mast, you should be able to locate the large game birds when the season opens.

14. Another alternative to shortening the time between Virginia's fall and spring turkey hunting seasons is to investigate existing open seasons in other states and regions. There are so many variations in climate, temperatures, growing seasons, traditions and philosophies influencing turkey seasons throughout these United States. Some states have both spring and autumn-winter seasons, while others offer only springtime or fall hunting opportunities. Should you be fortunate to have the time and funds available, you could substantially increase the days that you can legally hunt turkeys by jumping around from state to state. There are numerous turkey enthusiasts who take advantage of the progressively later seasons by starting early in Florida, and then moving up through the other southern states to the northeastern region. Additionally, each state has their own bag limits on turkeys. However, out-of-state special licenses, travel expenses and perhaps guide fees will result in very expensive wild turkey drumsticks!

There you have them—enough ideas for turkey related activities for an entire year. We wild turkey addicts are lucky for that! □

Kit Shaffer is a retired wildlife biologist with the Game Department, and was recently honored by the National Wild Turkey Federation with the C.B. McLeod Award for his work in wild turkey conservation and management.

When the summer
heat cranks up,
let a western
tributary stream
cool you down.

Cool Down Fishing

by Bob Gooch

A broad grin creased the happy angler's sunburned face. There was no way the relentless summer sun and the steaming heat were going to dampen his joy as he dug into a live well and hoisted a potbellied bass for all to admire. That was a good fish, possibly a citation largemouth. You had to admire an angler like that, one who would spend the day on the hot lake. There was no way to escape the heat—or the sun. If it didn't get to your skin from above, its reflection from the shimmering surface would burn you to a crisp. The dedicated bass angler was a good example. From the belt up his body was the color of a Maine lobster.

I've spent some hot summer days on big lakes all over Virginia—with mixed results. When the temperatures soar into the high nineties, however, and the sun beams mercilessly out of a cloudless blue sky, I like to head for the nearest well-shaded stream, usually some tributary of a well-known river.

Opposite: photo by Doug Stamm.



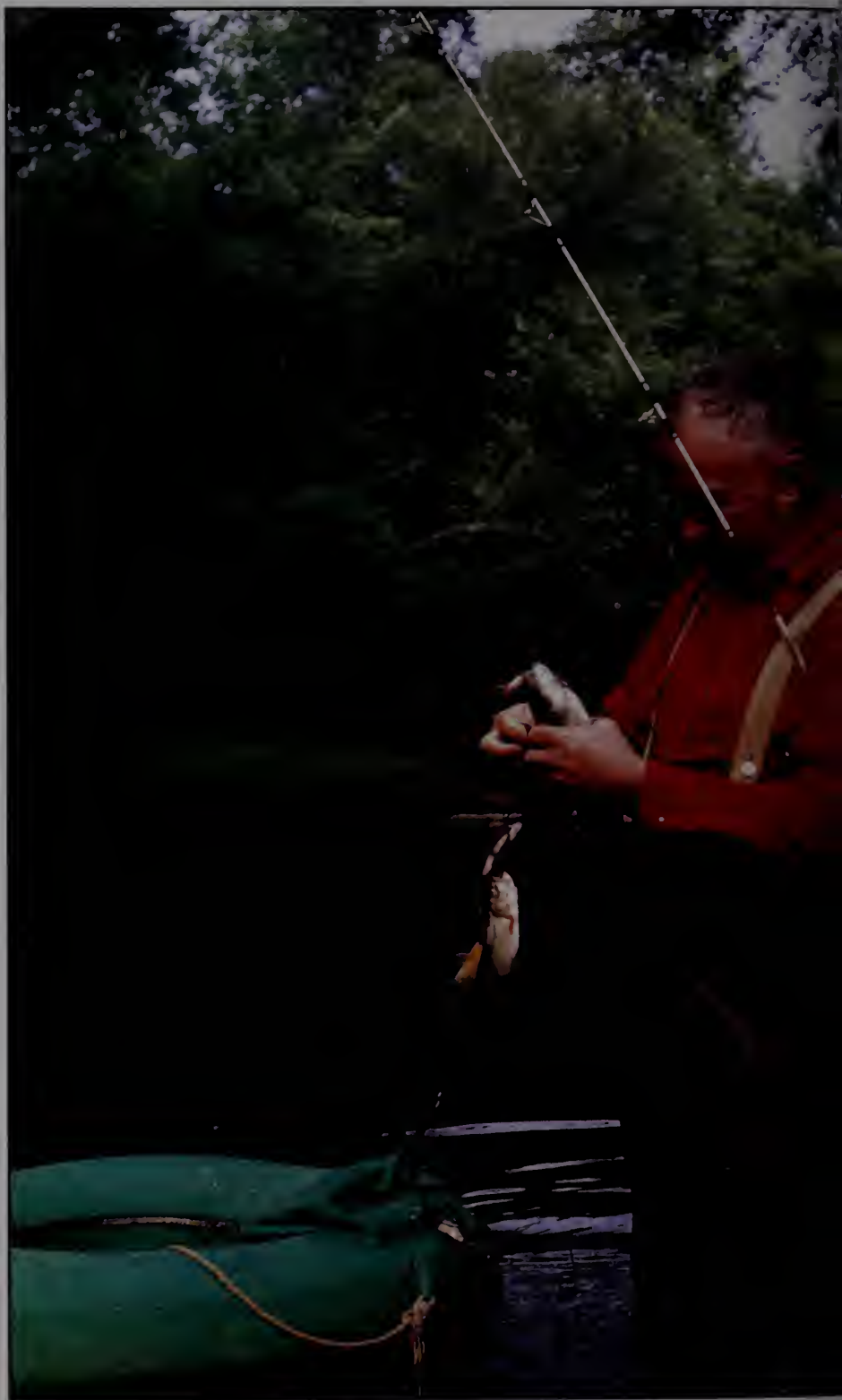
The small tributaries offer obvious advantages when conditions such as those described above exist, and fortunately for Virginia anglers, they can be found all over the state. An interesting way to locate such waters is to work out a river system, or at least part of it. There's a sense of adventure in following a river to its headwaters. You can begin with a map, but eventually the tiny headwaters, creeks and branches will have escaped the most careful cartographer. Then you are on your own—and possibly in water too small to fish. In between the major river and such tiny headwaters, however, are many miles of excellent stream fishing, fishing that generally is overlooked.

Let's take the James River, for example. Every angler in Virginia is probably familiar with the James River and its excellent smallmouth bass fishing.

Take the official state highway map and pick up the blue meandering line that runs west out of Richmond. That's the mighty James. Follow it upstream to Columbia and pick up another blue line that follows a winding route out of Albemarle County through Charlottesville and southeasterly through Fluvanna County to the James. That's the Rivanna, a major tributary of the James, and the first stream in Virginia to come under the state scenic river system.

Working out the tributaries of the Rivanna River, you come to a number of major tributaries including Ballinger, Boston, Carys, Cunningham, Mechunk, and Raccoon Creek in Fluvanna County, and Buck Island and Limestone in Albemarle. Northwest of Charlottesville, the Rivanna is formed by its North and South Forks, rivers with their own systems of tributaries. Once you leave the Rivanna, however, most of the streams are considered private waterways and permission is needed to fish them.

But, let's go back to Fluvanna County and work out a major tributary of the Rivanna. Mechunk Creek is a good example. It enters the river from the east and just upstream from the Crofton Public Access Area owned



Fishing a tributary stream can cool you off and get you into fish at the same time; photo by Ginny Gooch.



and maintained by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Mechunk Creek also gathers its headwaters in Albemarle County along the eastern slopes of Southwestern Mountain. Its major tributaries, however, are Oliver Creek in Fluvanna and Beaverdam Creek which enters Mechunk in Fluvanna, but rises in Louisa.

So, we've examined briefly a section of a major river, one of its major tributaries, and then its tributaries. In doing so we've uncovered miles of tributary waters and plenty of good fishing, fishing you will enjoy in the heat of summer. And that's just a sample, a tiny bit of such fishing available all over Virginia. The possibilities are endless.

Depending upon their location and the river system they feed, these smaller streams support a wide variety of fish. The James, for example, sends good populations of smallmouth bass up the tributaries, and I've caught good bass in the Rivanna, Mechunk Creek and both Beaverdam and Oliver Creeks, its major tributaries. And of course, there are the river sunfish, the fat and spunky yellowbreast often called redbelly or river bream. All of these streams hold channel catfish, and a few largemouth bass and crappies.

It's true, the James can also be hot in July and August, but even there the currents seem to keep a little air stirred up, and generally, the further you go up a river and its tributaries, the cooler will be the water and the air.

Chain pickerel are abundant in all of the tributaries, but less abundant in the Rivanna and the James.

Just as fish move up the streams from the James and Rivanna Rivers, they move into them from farm ponds built in the drainage systems. Most of these ponds hold largemouth bass and bluegills, and some host crappies and shellcrackers. Flood waters leak them into the tributaries where they flourish in the clean and fertile waters.

Further east in Virginia, tributaries of the James River hold warmouth and other sunfish and to the west there are rock bass and even a few trout in the some of the tributaries of the North and South Forks of the Rivanna River.

There are no trout, however, in Mechunk Creek or its tributaries.

Access to most of these tributary waters is fairly good—once you obtain the necessary permission from a landowner. And, while the Mechunk Creek and its tributaries flow through private land, tributaries further west on the James and near its headwaters are often on public lands such as the National Forest. Working the systems out as we did the Rivanna River and Mechunk will reveal them.

While it is often possible to fish the lower stretches of the tributaries from a canoe, a light boat, or even a tube, most are too small for floating by any means. The small waters are the ones I prefer to fish during the hot months. They are the coolest, and I find the fish most active there. Such streams are best fished by wading. I personally like to pull on chest waders, but they can also be waded wet—if you want to really cool down. Hip boots are also acceptable, but even in tiny streams the size of Beaverdam and Oliver Creeks, there is water too deep for hip boots. You won't be uncomfortable in chest waders or boots, even on steamy hot days. Those well-shaded waters will keep you cool.

You can take your choice between fly tackle and spinning tackle, and even the modern light casting tackle has possibilities. Spinning tackle must have been designed with these little streams in mind, however. It will handle the tiny lures that are often most effective, and it is extremely handy for casting in the often tight quarters. I use ultralight spinning tackle almost exclusively. I seldom go below a 4-pound test line, however, as you can encounter some surprisingly big fish in those small streams. They're tough and scrappy in the cool water, and often there is little room to maneuver them into open water.

The big waters can wait until September or October. Those hot, summer months will find me in some cool tributary stream. And I'll catch fish there. □

Bob Gooch is a well-known outdoor writer and author of the recently published Virginia Fishing Guide, now available in local bookstores.

After Opening Day

The trout may be finicky in June, but that doesn't mean you can't catch them.

by Bruce Ingram

The opening day of trout season in early spring has long been a time of bulging creels and full stringers in the Old Dominion. But then comes May with its warmer water and fewer trout, followed by the first month of summer. An American poet once said that with June "comes perfect days." That wordmaster, however, surely wasn't thinking about seeking out Virginia's trout after opening day.

For June is a time when the old tried and true tactics of spring no longer seem to work on the salmonid clan. Salmon eggs and various concoctions of cheese and marshmallows, which





the trout took so eagerly in March, now go unconsumed. Now is also the time when the trout enthusiast must become versatile if he wants to score.

For starters, the spinfisherman can tie on a variety of lures which can produce rainbows, browns, and brookies. And the bait fisherman has several kinds of live beasties that he can offer up to a sulking fish. An important key is to be willing to try something new. There may be days when it might be aesthetically pleasing, for example, to cast a No. 18 red ant, when the best approach might be to drift a nightcrawler through a pool. Conversely, there will be other days when the trout literally will take only a specific fly or nymph, and will turn up their noses at choice garden worms.

Live bait is scorned by some anglers; nevertheless, trout usually don't seem offended by it. As a boy, a friend and I once had gone fishless all morning after going through a variety of lures. Frustrated, we put down our poles and began seining minnows with an old window screen. After several sweeps through some riffles, we had enough dace for our purposes.

As I recall, the highlight of the morning was our catching a rather large brown trout that took a dace which was madly dashing about under a red-and-white bobber. The deep pool which the trout came from had earlier been churned to a froth—to no avail—by our lures.

Another good live bait is the crayfish. Some people believe that soft-shelled crawdads are the most appealing to trout—and that indeed may be true—but I believe the best tactic is simply to remove the pinchers from this member of the lobster family. A crayfish without its claws is a vulnerable creature indeed, and a prowling trout will seldom pass up a risk free meal such as this—regardless of whether the crustacean's shell is newly shed or not.

Nightcrawlers are scorned by some as trout bait, but they are very much a part of a salmonid's diet. Every time a hard rain hits, scores of these creatures are washed into your favorite trout stream. Trout also feed on worms that make their way into streams via

undercut banks. It's no wonder that this particular form of cover is a favorite trout holding ground.

Two last tips on using live bait. Regarding hooks, Aberdeens are a good choice, especially for minnows. This hook has a round bend and a wide gap between the point and shank. I like to impale minnows and crayfish through the tail and nightcrawlers once through the head. This assures that the various baits will remain lively for a longer time. Put on a fresh critter when the bait's vigor diminishes.

And, second, use as little weight as possible. The purpose of affixing a sinker is to keep bait from riding up and out of a fish's strike zone. On the other hand, you don't want to "anchor" the bait to the bottom, either. Clip on enough sinkers to allow your offering to drift naturally over the bottom.

If I had to choose one lure to take on a trout fishing trip, it would be an in-line spinner. Several years ago on a Virginia trout stream, a friend and I had worked both flies and various live baits through a riffle area without success. Meanwhile, an elderly gentleman across the creek from us was fishing the same pool, and literally was catching one trout after another.

I have very little shame when it comes to fishing, and it didn't take long for me to ask the fellow angler what his secret was. He uttered only two words, "Panther Martins."

Panther Martin, Mepps, and Blue Fox are just a few of the brands that manufacture quality in-line spinners. I even like to use spinners when I visit streams that require lures with single, barbless hooks. I merely remove two of the three hooks on the lure, and file down the barb on the remaining one. Last June, a buddy and I visited the trout streams in the Shenandoah National Forest. Casting with a fly rod proved difficult under the low hanging canopies that envelope many creeks in the park.

I finally began to catch brookies when I switched to a short spinning outfit and made sidearm casts to likely spots. My barbless single hooked Mepps ended up producing several good fish.

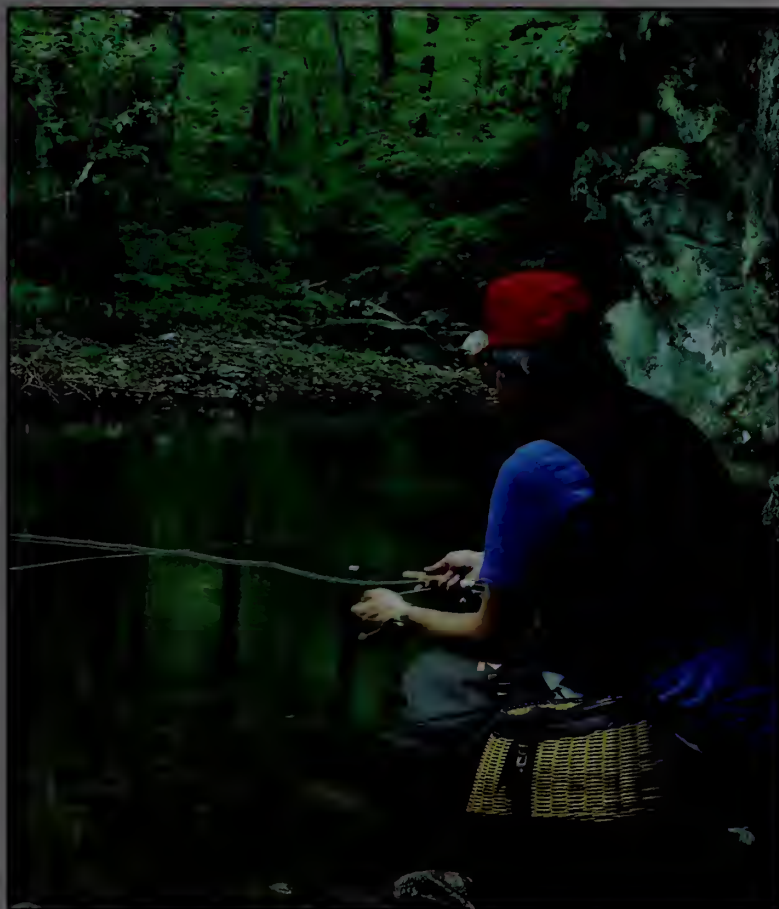
Other good lures are silver spoons, white or yellow jigs, small minnowlike plugs and popping bugs. Again, it's important to be versatile in your choice of lures, and not to get hung up on just one size or color.

Another important consideration for lure use is line weight. In the streams of the Shenandoah National Park, two to four-pound test is the best choice. In those streams where a nine-inch brook trout is a true trophy,

"When the fish are really finicky, size 18 to 20 midges are extremely good as are standard patterns such as muddler minnows, sculpins, and classic bucktails."

small diameter line is an absolute necessity in the clear, low water conditions of June.

On the other hand, six-pound test (and there are some who would vote for eight-pound mono) would be best for our larger trout streams like the Smith River near Bassett. When you have a chance to tangle with a four or five-pound Smith brown, it would take more skill than most of us have—including this writer—to subdue a fish of that size with two-pound mono.



Summer trout fishing is a whole lot more challenging than the early season of cheese balls and salmon eggs. Fishing this time of year requires new tactics—from different lures to different fishing outfits.

Tying on a popping bug may be the answer to catching that trophy rainbow trout in the summer.



Just as there are times when bait or lures perform best, so there are times when various flies will be the superior choice. Gary Carter, an accomplished Roanoke angler, has developed a plan for June trout.

"On many Virginia streams, the water will be getting lower and warmer in June, even on our mountain streams," he says. "Then, it's time to start considering terrestrials. Size 12 Letort crickets and smaller grasshopper patterns such as size 12 Joe's and Dave's hoppers will do well. Size 16 or 18 black ants are another good standby.

"For nymphing, wooly worms in various sizes are a good all around choice. When the fish are really finicky, size 18 to 20 midges are extremely good as are standard patterns such as muddler minnows, sculpins, and classic bucktails. I would use the latter flies in size 4 to 10 depending on the water I'm fishing, with size 8 being a good all-purpose selection."

Carter, who lives in Roanoke, says that his rod choice will depend on where he is fishing. Short rods in the 7 to 7½ foot lengths that will cast a four weight line are best for smaller streams. On the state's larger waterways, he prefers 8½ to 9 foot rods that can handle four or five weight line. The Roanoker also has a tip on where to fish in your favorite trout stream.

"Most people tend to fish the pools later in the season, but you shouldn't rule out the riffles. Lots of trout will hold in this fairly shallow water because the oxygen levels can be higher there. Also there is a lot of food in the riffles. Search out the pocket water or the little seams in the current. That's where the trout will be waiting for something to rush by."

Angling for trout doesn't have to conclude with the end of spring. The fish will be harder to come by, it's true, but the ones you do catch bring great satisfaction. Keep your options open as to which baits, lures, and flies to tie on—and don't restrict yourselves to any one philosophy—try them all. □

Bruce Ingram is the Virginia editor for Outdoor Life magazine and a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife.

Counting on


Piping plover, a Virginia nesting bird and an endangered species; photo by Rob Simpson.



Mamas & Papas

A six-year study on the breeding birds in Virginia is yielding valuable information on the birds raising their young here, and has opened up a new opportunity for birders as well.

by YuLee Larner



Again this summer, about 350 dedicated birders will take to the fields in search of Virginia's breeding birds. They are participants in Virginia's Breeding Bird Atlas Project (VAP), an ambitious venture initiated in 1984 by the Virginia Society of Ornithology.

The project has added a new dimension to birdwatching, a blend of birding for fun as well as for a purpose. Participants have learned to spend more time in the field, quietly observing small wonders of the natural world, since field work is required almost year around in order to locate certain species, especially owls and raptors. However, atlasers work their longest hours in the summer, the time of year many experienced birders previously considered "dull" or "slow," a time lacking in excitement and challenge. Atlasing has changed all that. In fact, most of the birders who agreed in the summer of 1984 to spend from 16 to 20 hours in "blocks" of only 10 square miles have continued working in the project, and already are gearing up for their fifth year.

Human activities have profound effects on the natural world upon which the survival of all living things, including people, depends. Because of this, it is important to record the status of natural communities to provide a baseline with which to compare and contrast the effects of future activities. Thus, VSO initiated the six-year Atlas

Project, with the help of additional funds from local chapters of the VSO and the National Audubon Society, private contributions, and the Game Department's Nongame and Endangered Species Program—the tax check-off fund. And, because the vast majority of birders, both professional and amateur, are aware of the importance of such data, and are concerned with environmental issues, they are willing to continue the field work until the Atlas is finished.

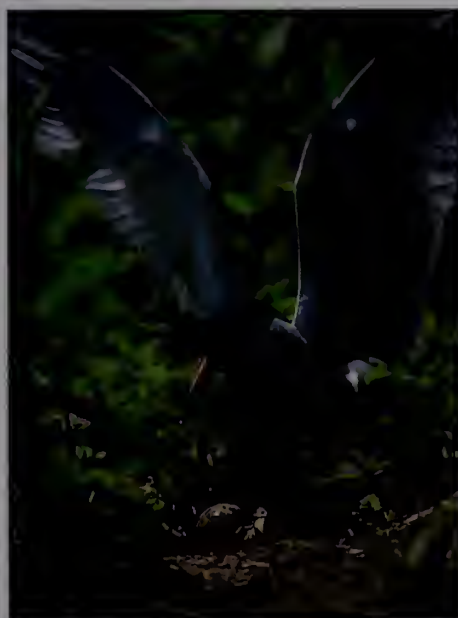
The framers of the VSO constitution believed the most important purpose of the Society should be "to promote the study of birds in Virginia and to bring together and record scientific and other data relating to their habits." Since the Society was organized in 1929, there has never been a project that involved so many of its members in a statewide scientific study of this magnitude.

The immediate goal of VAP is to document the presence of all birds that breed in Virginia and to identify fragile or unusual habitats that support rare species. This is but the first step. The project will provide a baseline data against which future changes in range and status of breeding birds can be compared. Also, it will help environmental planners in making wise decisions regarding resource use in Virginia. Already, unpublished data from VAP have been requested for use by





The yellow-crowned night-heron and the common tern are two Virginia nesting birds that the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Project has kept records on for the past four years. Left: Immature yellow-crowned night-heron; photo by William S. Lea. Below: Common tern; photo by Rob Simpson.



students and college professors in various research projects.

In addition to fulfilling the original goals of VAP, observers are adding immeasurably to local records for every section of Virginia. Using a fairly simple system of codes, observers rate every species as a "possible," "probable," or "confirmed," breeding bird. VAP will provide important data for Virginia which eventually will be combined and compared with similar information from other eastern states as well as in the entire country. Still, the immediate results are invaluable to compilers of local records and county-wide annotated checklists.

For atlasing purposes, Virginia is divided into 12 regions, each with its own coordinators, who recruit volunteer field workers. The southeast, one-sixth of each of the state's 807 quadrangles is considered the "priority block." At this date, 482 of these blocks have been covered to some extent, as well as 947 non-priority blocks.

So far, Virginia's 350 atlasers have identified 221 species of breeding birds, some in previously unknown locations. Highlights include the documented nesting of pied-billed grebe, yellow-crowned night heron, mute swan, king rail, and brown creeper in Northern Virginia. Volunteers in Southside Virginia recorded the first confirmed nesting of Virginia rail in the Piedmont, and probably the second known nesting of common moorhen. They have located other uncommon species such as tree swallow, willow flycatcher, cedar waxwing, and solitary vireo, evidence that these birds are extending their range into the southern Piedmont.

Birders hiking the back roads and mountain lands west of the Blue Ridge confirmed the nesting of pied-billed grebe, black duck, spotted sandpiper, willow flycatcher, Bewick's wren, and hermit thrush. Down on the coast, they found the first Virginia nests of brown pelicans on Fisherman and Metomkin Islands in 1987.

This new dimension in birding is so enjoyable that many birders will probably continue working in favorite areas even after the Atlas is completed. The

We Need Your Help

by John B. Bazum, Jr.

Four field seasons have now passed for the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Project (VAP) and with them has come an unparalleled mass of data on the birds that nest in Virginia. Yet, only about 60 percent of the priority coverage blocks in the state have so far been completed, and the project is rapidly coming to a close.

This project set out to provide solid baseline breeding bird data on one block of land within each of the 807 USGS topographic maps that cover Virginia. From the start, the project has been essentially all-volunteer, just

as it has been in the many other states (and provinces and countries) that have developed or are developing a breeding bird atlas. It is these volunteers, most of them working in the field to make the sightings that will become part of the Atlas, who power the projects. Virginia's volunteers have done a wonderful, massive job so far, but this is a very large state and only two more field seasons (already an increase from the hoped-for time period) are available if the project field work is to be completed on time.

The VAP desperately needs help from all competent birders who like to get out into the field and carefully observe birds, either on their own or as a participant in a regional miniforay. If you are at all interested, and not actively participating now, won't you please call or write a VAP Regional Coordinator for the part of Virginia you are interested in working in? Be sure to ask about his or her miniforay for this year, the dates of which are located to the right of each region heading. There is plenty of work for all.

Region 1 (June 25-26)

Julie Simpson
11 E. Monmouth
Winchester, VA 22601
(703) 662-7043 or 635-4734

Region 2 (June 11-12)

Stephen Eccles
8904 Narem Place
Annandale, VA 22003
(703) 978-5791

Byron Swift

2241 Observatory Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007
(202) 333-6890

Region 3 (June 25-26)

A. Clair Mellinger
Eastern Mennonite College
Harrisonburg, VA 22801
(703) 433-2771

Isabel Obenschain
Rt. 1, Box 25F

Mt. Sidney, VA 24467
(703) 363-5592

Peter W. Bergstrom
Department of Biology
Washington and Lee University
Lexington, VA 24450
(703) 463-8897 or 463-6684

Region 4 (June 18-19)

Bob Barbee
1521 Rugby Road
Charlottesville, VA 22903
(804) 293-3141

Allen and Mary Hale
Rt. 1, Box 242
Shipman, VA 22971
(804) 263-4842

Teresa W. Shaner
318 Dover Drive
Charlottesville, VA 22901
(804) 973-2862

Region 5 (June 11-12)

Lawrence Latane III
Rt. 1, Box 703
Washington's Birthplace, VA 22575
(804) 224-7039

Region 6 (June 4-5)

Marilyn and Irvin Ailes
RFD 1, Box 365-22
Chincoteague, VA 23336
(804) 336-3441

Region 7 (June 4-5)

E.E. Scott
Rt. 1
Nickelsville, VA 24271
(703) 479-2291

Steven L. Hopp
Emory and Henry College
Emory, VA 24327
(703) 944-3121 or 944-5646

Region 8 (June 25-26)

Tad Finnell
3830 Penn Forest Boulevard
Roanoke, VA 24018
(703) 989-5055

Clyde Kessler
106 P.T. Travis Ave.
Radford, VA 24141
(703) 639-5076 (before 10 pm)

Region 9 (June 18-19)

John and Thelma Dalmas
520 Rainbow Forest Drive
Lynchburg, VA 24502
(804) 239-2730

Region 10 (June 11-12)

Larry Robinson and Mary Arginteanu
3320 Landria Drive
Richmond, VA 23225
(804) 320-0138 or 786-4899

Region 11 (June 18-19)





Sue Ridd
P.O. Box 6837
Richmond, VA 23230
(804) 320-1997 or 367-8972

Region 12 (June 4-5)

Bob Ake
615 Carolina Avenue
Norfolk, VA 23508
(804) 625-6082

Becky White
1149 Larchmont Crescent
Norfolk, Va 23508
(804) 489-7067



-  confirmed breeding record (for example, used nests or eggshells found, occupied nests observed, nest with eggs or young seen or heard)
-  possible breeding record (for example, a bird present in suitable nesting habitat during its breeding season)
-  probable breeding record (for example, a pair observed in suitable habitat during its breeding season or courtship behavior observed)
-  observed breeding record (for example, a bird observed during its breeding season, but no evidence of breeding is recorded)

satisfaction in participating in such a project is reflected in this statement by an Atlas coordinator, who said: "When I became a participant in the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Project in 1984, I thought I was doing it as a bird-watcher. I never expected to become a better scientist as a result of this work. Yet the atlas project has done just that. It has made me a keener observer of bird behavior and has contributed significantly to our knowledge of Virginia birds."

Atlasers, chilled to the bone, have heard the hoots of great horned owls on moonlit nights, and traced their shadowy flights across silvery snow covered fields. They have listened to flute-like notes of veeries and hermit thrushes rippling down the slopes of damp hemlock ravines. They have walked the dry, dusty roads of Southside Virginia, climbed the western mountains, and sloshed through coastal marshes. Still, these dedicated and scientifically oriented amateurs continue to ask for more.

While documentation of the most common species is relatively easy, atlasers have a more difficult assignment in their search for game birds, nocturnal, and wetland species. Such birds are usually not highly visible and may be missed in conventional surveys. For help in locating these species, field workers often contact local residents who may have heard the birds calling, or hunters who know of their whereabouts.

This personal contact is yet another plus for volunteers in the Atlas Project. All across the state, field workers have been graciously received by local residents. In many instances, the contact leads to the discovery of one or more hard-to-find species.

Every Virginia resident has an opportunity to participate in the Atlas venture. If you know the location of any unusual species, or if you would like more information about the Virginia Atlas Project, you are encouraged to write to: VAP, P.O. Box 6837, Richmond, VA 23230. □

YuLee Larner is a columnist for the Staunton News Leader, past president of the Virginia Society of Ornithology and president of the Augusta Bird Club.

The small bobber shattered the glassy calm in the shadows of an overhanging laurel in full bloom. It was quiet only long enough for me to gulp a couple of swallows of orange juice. Suddenly, the little red and white bobber jumped and "blurped" under the surface. The angler at the other end grinned with delight as he set the hook into another big hungry redear sunfish and brought it to the boat. He couldn't help but stop a moment to admire the gleaming fish.

Lake Cohoon in Portsmouth is what you might term a "relaxin' lake." It's a leave-the-pressures-behind, fish-at-your-own-pace lake. It has numerous finger-like coves extending out from its main basin, most of which are usually isolated, giving an individual plenty of space. In fact, most weekdays the fishing pressure is relatively light, and an angler can have literally hundreds of yards of shoreline to him or herself.

The lake is scenic with little development of any kind. Laurel, alder and sweetgum line the shores along with a variety of smaller plants, many of which bloom at varying times of the year. Cedar, pine, holly, oak and beech form a backdrop to the shoreline vegetation.

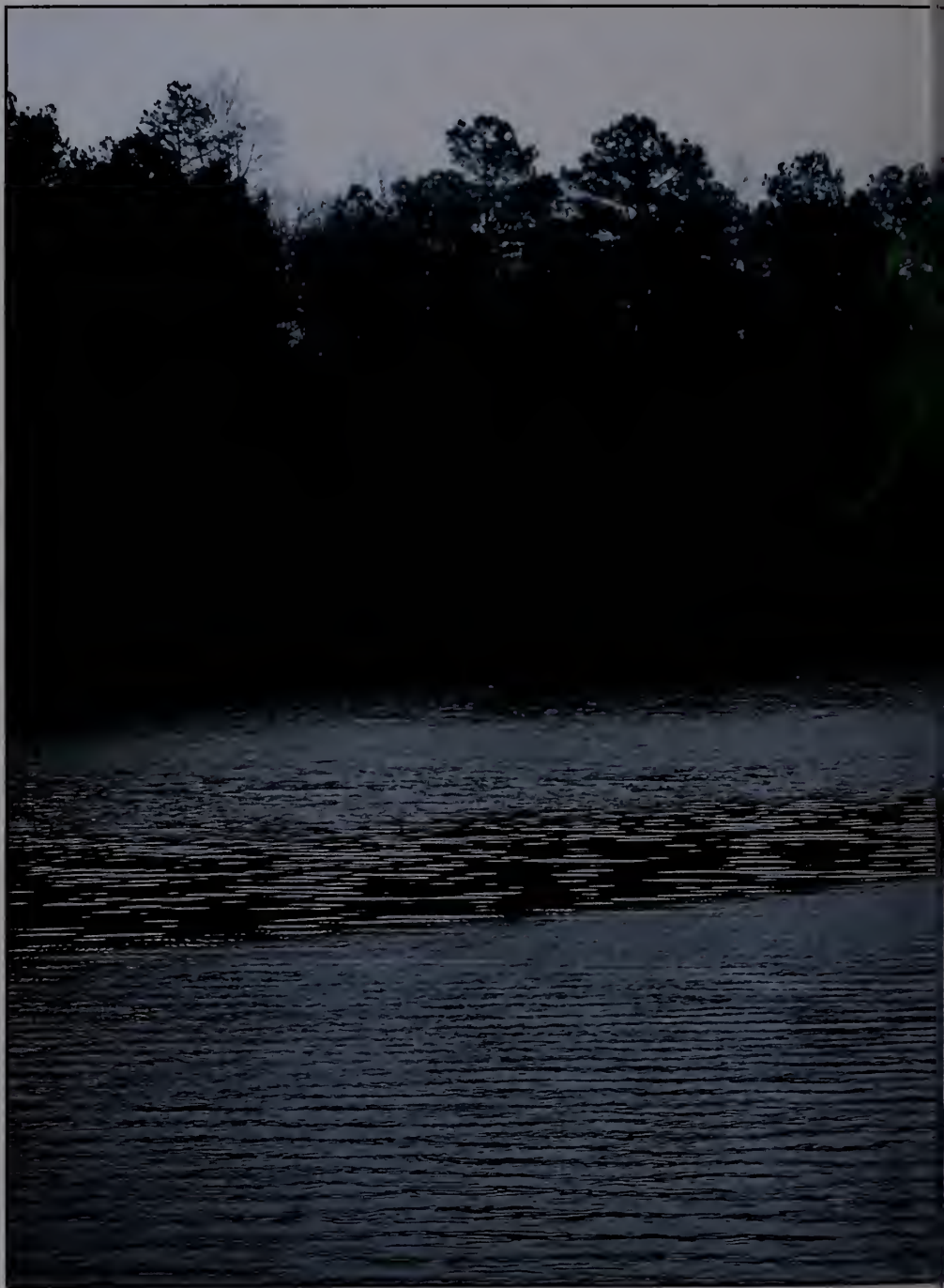
Lake Cohoon is a Portsmouth water supply lake, but is referred to as one of the "Suffolk lakes" because it is located in Suffolk. The 510-acre lake, with a maximum depth of 32 feet, was impounded in 1913 on Cohoon Creek and Eley Swamp drainages of the Nansemond River. The brushy, wooded coves do a lot for the quality of the fishery as well as the fishing experience.

Mitchell Norman, the Game Department's regional supervising fish biologist in that area, has worked and watched the lake for many years. He says the lake has a "good, balanced natural fishery," which doesn't require much management. Norman adds that, "chain pickerel are good all year, but probably the best fishing can be had during the winter. Largemouth bass are good in spring. For crappie, the spawning times during March and April are best. Bluegill and redear spawn from April to early June, but bluegills can be taken all year." The

by Spike Knuth

Lake

A Portsmouth



Cohoon

Lake Profile



lake also has fliers, yellow perch and warmouths.

Fishing techniques in spring and early summer can be quite simple. Just work in close to the shoreline, fishing up under or near the overhanging brush. Not only are fish spawning at this time, but they also watch for caterpillars and other insects to fall or get blown from the branches. It is also shaded under the shrubs, giving the fish security. In summer, it's cooler under this vegetation—especially where the shore drops off into deeper water.

The best artificials are the beetle-spins, small jigs or small spinner-bucktails. Garden worms, redworms and especially crickets are the best live baits for bluegills and redears. Remember that redears are bottom feeders, so fish your offering close to, and even on the bottom.

For crappies, work over the numerous brush piles, submerged stumps and logs, or fallen trees with jigs or small minnows. There are a number of bridges that cross certain covers which will provide crappie action. For bass, live minnows, nightcrawlers, spinner-baits, plastic worms, jigs of varying types and a variety of crankbaits are effective. Pickerel will hit about anything when feeding, but live minnows, crankbaits, spinner-bucktails and Hairy-worms are a good bet.

Another important feature of the lake is the convenient fishing station that provides boat rentals, ramp, bait, tackle, licenses, drinks and snacks. The area surrounding the station is park-like and offers some shorefishing opportunities and a nice picnic ground. Actually, you have the choice of fishing Lake Meade as well, since it is located just below the Lake Cohoon dam.

The Cohoon-Meade fishing station and ramp is located on Route 604—Pitchkettle Road—just off of Route 58 in Suffolk. For permit, boat rental, boat launching fees and other information, contact the station at its new number, 804/539-6216. □

Spike Knuth is the publications supervisor for the Department.

Leave your popping bug in your
tackle box and tie on a dry fly.

Under the right conditions, it's a
sure thing for smallmouth bass.

story & photos by Harry Murray

Catch 'em on a Dry

Several years ago, after a fairly successful June evening of smallmouth bass dry fly fishing, I noticed a heavy gelatinous mass all over the outside of my waders, below the water line. My first thought was that some pollutant had been released into the river, but on examining my waders closely, I realized they were covered with thousands of clusters of caddis eggs.

While fishing, I had been aware of many adult caddis flies returning to the stream to lay eggs and had started with a size 10 Olive Elk Hair caddis which produced well. But, this had been one of those times when things just seemed

to be going right and I had failed to properly appreciate the tremendous numbers of insects which must have been present. The next evening I was back in the same area and decided to spend some time just watching before I started fishing. Sure enough, the Olive Caddis were back in thick cloud-like formations as they made their upstream mating flight before dropping to the surface to deposit their eggs.

No, this will not go on all season long, but I have seen it last several weeks. This entire period provides outstanding bass dry fly action, even

though the rivers are still quite full. Then, during June and early July, many mayflies emerge from our bass streams. These are seldom present in the thick concentrations of the earlier caddis flies, except late in the evening. At this time there may be spinners from several different species of mayflies returning to the stream to mate in the familiar "mayfly dance" and lay their eggs. As these spent flies die and fall onto the stream surface, smallmouth feed readily upon them. They seem to have no qualms about sucking under a cream-colored fly here, going two feet to the right to take a green one, only to drift back a foot to feed



The dry flies that work on smallmouths: Top row, left to right: Improved Sofa Pillow, Irresistible, Light Caddis Buck. Second row: cricket, grasshopper, Elk Hair Caddis.

upon a brown one. We know trout seldom feed in this manner, but smallmouth apparently think that they all taste good, and can see no reason to pass up any of them. And, fortunately, all of our mayflies are not small. Several years ago, Mike Hollar and I were floating the North Fork of the Shenandoah River on a hot summer afternoon. Our best action had been in the riffles, and since the canoe was just drifting along at its own pace through some deep, slow water between the riffles, we chose this time for a late lunch.

As we drifted slowly along, we both became aware of the increasing number of rise-forms in the flat water. Within

15 minutes, the surface was literally covered with these little telltales of where a fish had sucked under a natural insect. Spotting a dark form on the surface close by the canoe, Mike carefully skimmed it off with the canoe paddle. After a quick glance, he shoved the canoe blade in my direction, with its unwilling passenger still on board. Sure enough, it was our much loved Brown Drake Mayfly. This gets the smallmouth going simply because it is a "big bug," making it well worth his time to feed upon it.

I like to use a size 8 Irresistible when the Brown Drake is on. It is fairly close in size and color to the natural insect, but it also possesses another signifi-

cant advantage. Many of these naturals hatch from the slower, deeper parts of our rivers, as they did that day with us, and the bass often cruise to find them. The Irresistible has a very full deer hair body, which seems to be easy for the bass to spot from considerable distances. Some of the more conventional ties do look much like the natural, but, having slimmer bodies, they don't seem to produce as well in water over five feet deep.

If you do encounter smallmouth working on this, or other large mayflies in slow water, don't cover the water in a shotgun fashion, just hoping your fly will fall over a hungry fish. Pick out one fish feeding within casting



Skating a dry damselfly imitation around grassbeds for smallmouth bass on a river like the South Fork of the Shenandoah can be productive.

distance and try to determine his cruising path by watching for his rise-forms. If you can actually see the bass, so much the better, but this is seldom the case. Once you think you know where he is heading, cast your fly out about five to six feet in front of him. As he gets within two to three feet of the fly, give it a gentle twitch. If he had not already spotted it, this will call his attention to it; if he already knew it was there, maybe he will think it is trying to make its getaway. At any rate, we're now in the game. Easy does it, he is not going to smash this as he would a fast-moving popper. He will actually suck it under quite delicately just as a trout would, so be easy on the strike.

Summer brings another large aquatic insect which all fish love—the giant stone fly. This fly is often considered to be an indicator of good water quality. I realize that not all portions of our smallmouth streams have heavy hatches of giant stone flies, but this is improving. Each year, I see more and more of these insects and make increasingly impressive catches on its imitations.

I like the Improved Sofa Pillow in size 6 and the Light Caddis Buck (the name is misleading) in size 8 for smallmouth when the stone flies are on.

The Improved Sofa Pillow is actually larger than many deer hair surface bugs normally associated with flyrod-

ding for bass, so you can expect action from quite respectable smallmouth.

I continue to use these last two flies throughout July and August and even though the stone flies are over, they continue to produce well. During these two months, our streams are loaded with dragonflies and damselflies. I believe the bass are forgiving enough to let us get by with these patterns even though they are not a perfect match. These ties certainly outperform those concocted to match these two natural insects.

Several years ago, I had been fishing one of my favorite sections of the South Fork of the Shenandoah River using every trick in the book with very



poor results. After five hours of this I assumed the warm waters of August were responsible for this midday slowdown and I decided to call things off until evening. As I was returning my flies from my drying pad to my fly box, I spotted one of these big Improved Sofa Pillows. Remembering an old trout technique, I decided to experiment.

Attaching that big dry fly to a 2x leader, I greased both the fly and the leader quite generously with silicon floatant. Shooting this Sofa Pillow in tight to the bank, I quickly raised the rod tip and stripped in all the slack with my line hand. The instant that fly touched the water I brought it to life.

With a sweeping action of the rod the well greased fly skated and bounced across the surface in a very lively looking manner. Not only did this produce several very nice smallmouth out of the shade close to the bank, but those around the grassbeds in mid-river were equally impressed.

It is important to remember, however, that not all of the insects which find their way to the surface of our bass rivers come from the stream bottom. By late summer, grasshoppers and crickets are plenty big enough to bring up respectable smallmouth.

Since these two insects are naturally found on dry land, you will get your best results by concentrating your

efforts on the shoreline. I like to position myself out in the river a comfortable casting distance from the bank so that I can accurately drop my size 10 or 12 hopper quite close to dry land. I let it lie motionless for several seconds, and if this fails to bring a strike, I twitch it very slightly. If no rise comes to this after five or 10 seconds I give it a firm jerk to move it about a foot. Often, possibly assuming that his lunch is getting away from him, a good smallmouth will hit the hopper violently.

Contrary to the normally accepted tactics for dry fly fishing, I almost always fish my hoppers and crickets down and across stream. I find it is easier to give a natural action to them



The author brings in a smallmouth on an Improved Sofa Pillow on the North Fork of the Shenandoah River during a stone fly hatch.

in this way.

For this type of dry fly fishing, I prefer 9-foot graphite fly rods that handle 7 or 8 lines for the largest of flies you will use, and occasionally I use a 9-foot rod for a number 6 line for some of the smaller flies. This last outfit does permit a more delicate presentation, which can be quite an advantage when our rivers get low in late summer.

Many fly fishermen prefer floating fly lines with a weight-forward taper for this type fishing instead of the conventional double tapered line. A third possibility, which I have been using for quite a few years, is the floating shooting head. Late in the summer, when spooky conditions exist, I often find I can improve my catches on dry flies by simply being able to reach out with long casts. The shooting head or weight forward taper simplifies this considerably.

Dry fly bass leaders are the least expensive, and yet possibly, the most important item of our tackle. Early in the summer when we use small caddis patterns in the full streams, a conventional 7½-foot leader tapered to 3x is great, but as the summer progresses and the fish get spooky, we must make some adjustments. Our dilemma is somewhat more complicated by the fact that some of our late season dry flies, like the size 6 Sofa Pillow, are quite wind-resistant.

Large flies like this simply will not turn over or fish properly on a finely-tipped leader. Fortunately, bass do not require the cobweb-light leader-fly connection some trout demand. I seldom fish a tippet any finer than 3x for smallmouth. I do, however, often use leaders which are constructed of a compound taper of 12 to 14 feet. Our smallmouth convinced me long ago that I caught more sizeable fish by keeping the uncoiling tip of the fly line as far as possible from the waiting bass.

If you like to take acrobatic smallmouth bass on light tackle, I think you will find Virginia's river bronzesacks will exceed your greatest expectations on dry flies. □

Harry Murray teaches flyfishing in Edinburg and is author of the newly published book, Flyfishing for Smallmouth Bass.

Habitat

For you and wildlife

Bee Balm

This is a plant that looks like Phyllis Diller. The ragged clusters of tubular flowers that sit atop the square stems of bee balm remind me of nothing as much as Phyllis Diller's hair. All Diller needs are a few hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies buzzing around her head to make the association perfect.

Despite their resemblance to Diller, bee balm blossoms are beautiful. They're also outstanding performers—hardy and undemanding. They'll play the role of ragged wild thing in the meadow, or of prim perennial in the border. But wherever they perform, they steal the show.

In Virginia, the common name "bee balm" is often applied to two species of native plants: *Monarda fistulosa* and *Monarda didyma*. *Monarda fistulosa* or wild bergamot, has lavender blossoms and is more common than the red *Monarda didyma* in Virginia. They are both mobbed by bees, hummingbird moths, hummingbirds, and butterflies when they bloom in midsummer. Even the spent flower heads have value to wildlife because birds use the seeds as food.

Both *Monarda fistulosa* and *Monarda didyma* are easy to grow. A tiny wild bergamot seedling that I put in about four years ago has spread to form a mat about three feet wide. A stand of red bee balm that grows beside a neighbor's driveway had equally humble beginnings, but now it lights up the neighborhood with a six foot expanse of mahogany red blooms on four foot stems in July. Both species will grow almost anywhere, but *Monarda didyma* needs more moisture than *Monarda fistulosa*. It thrives best in wet areas like streambanks, pond sites, or wet meadows—or near a hose. The lavender

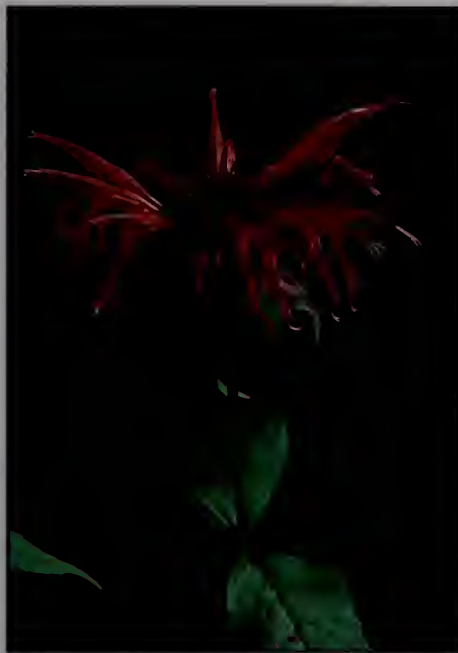


photo by Rob Simpson

(and sometimes white or pink) *Monarda fistulosa* will tolerate drier soil than *Monarda didyma*. They both like full to filtered sun, but *Monarda fistulosa* is the more sun-loving of the two.

Bee balm spreads rapidly through underground runners, and you may soon have too much of a good thing if you don't move or discard some of the runners. They like to spread into the grass in my yard, and I know it the minute I've run over them with the lawn mower because their foliage is so fragrant. Most people describe bee balm as smelling like mint. That doesn't fit my experience of bee balm's fragrance, but I can't seem to do any better. I do know that even if I happen to brush up against bee balm when I'm weeding, the fragrance is unmistakable, and a treat.

Bee balm plants are available from most mail order nurseries. Native Gardens (Rt. 1, Box 494, Greenback, TN 37742) sells small plants for about \$2.50 each. I'm told that bee balm is also easy to start from seed. Wildflower expert Harry Phillips recommends starting the seed indoors in flats in January. Passiflora (Rt. 1, Box 190-A, Germantown, NC 27019) is one of many seed sources.

Like most native herbs, bee balm has had medicinal and culinary uses galore. Both the Oswego Indians and the colonists used the dried leaves as tea. An infusion of the leaves was used to treat fevers, sore throats, stomach aches, and colds. The Indians also used the leaves to flavor meat, and oils from the leaves to treat rheumatism, bronchial complaints, and even pimples. Bee balm oils were also mixed with bear grease to perfume tonics that the Indians used to dress their hair. Phyllis Diller, take note. □

Family Outdoors

Spike Knuth

Shorefishing Tips

So, you don't have a boat. You can't get out to "where the big ones are" as the saying goes. For youngsters, oldsters or anyone who is boatless, being shorebound doesn't mean you can't catch fish. Shorefishing can definitely be productive for those who don't have a boat, or simply prefer to fish from shore.

Spring is the best time for shorefishing. Water temperatures are comfortable for the fish that are drawn into shore to spawn. At this time, fish populations along shore are at a maximum. In summer, evening, night and early morning shorefishing also can be very productive. With the coming of fall, fish will again be found inshore for a brief period until the shallows cool, sending them to deeper water.

There are many tips—very simple tips—that can help a shorebound angler catch more fish. One key tip is learning where to fish. Here are seven "where-to" tips that the shore fisherman can consider:

1. Fish the edge of a swimming area or in the swimming area (if allowable), after the swimmers have gone home. Food stirred up from the bottom or uncovered by the swimming activity will attract hungry bluegills and sunfish. The swimming areas in state park lakes, however, are off limits for fishing during summer. But, in spring, when bluegills seek out these sandy areas to spawn, fish the edges where the bluegills fan out their nests.

2. Look for fallen trees, brush piles, sunken logs and stumps. Largemouth bass, bluegills, and especially, crappies, are fond of these areas. Fish in as close to them as possible at varying depths.

3. Overhanging trees or undercut banks offer shade, shelter and cooler water in summer. As insects fall off overhanging branches, bluegills will be waiting for them.

4. Any kind of raft, pier, boat dock, old sunken boat or similar structure also offers shade and shelter for fish to lay in wait for prey. Fish up alongside of these structures, but don't walk out on them.

5. Water inlets or outlets that connect two bodies of water will attract numerous species of fish. Water currents moving back and forth through culverts or under narrow bridges carry food, and largemouth bass, chain pickerel, stripers and hybrid stripers will be found there.

6. A steep dropoff from shore is another ideal place to fish. Often these areas will have large rocks that offer cover to the fish. These dropoffs are perfect for casting jigs and deep-running crankbaits for smallmouths, or maybe even walleyes.

7. If possible, fish the area around

the dam of an impoundment. In most cases, this is where the deeper water is.

Of course, there are many other things to look for as far as where to fish from shore. There are also many methods or tips that will aid in putting fish on the stringer. Try chumming with crankbaits, spinnerbaits or spoons. Flashy, active lures cast a number of times will draw panfish closer to investigate, so that you can cast a worm or cricket to them. Approach a bank quietly. Step lightly and keep a low profile as a trout fisherman does. Be sneaky! Also, use light tackle. Ultra-light gear is easy to handle and gives the capability of casting light lures—even flies. If you get good action out of one particular area, leave it alone for awhile, move on, but come back later to try it again.

Just because you're boatless, doesn't mean you have to be fishless! □



photo by Gregory Scott

Safety

Water . . . Friend or Foe

While you are out in your boat, the friendly water holds your boat up, floats it, and may rock it gently. However, water can be a little too friendly, because it always wants to come into your boat with you. Sometimes you know how it gets in, and sometimes there is no easy explanation for all of that water in your boat.

Many boats have below-water openings for various purposes, and they must be checked frequently. Some of these check points are: the water supply for engine cooling systems, the bait-pump supply, the propeller-shaft, and the head-suction. These, and any other through-hull fittings you know of, could be leaking.

In addition, an engine cooling water line may break, and if the engine is running, it could be pumping the boat full of water. In that case, shut off the engine and tape or replace the line. In smaller boats, leaving the drain-plug out, or not securing it properly, may be the cause of a leak. Of course, there may be a hull leak caused by hull weakness or by hitting a submerged object. If you find a damaged area, stuff rags, blankets, clothing, or a pillow into the area. Wedge the stuffing in place with a paddle, board, pipe or similar object braced against a rigid part of the boat.

If it appears that the boat will sink despite your efforts, make a distress call on your radio, make certain everyone has on a personal flotation device, put on clothing to prevent sunburn, prepare to take along any floatable items such as rubber rafts, dinghies, etc. In addition, beverage-type insulated jugs to slake thirst, a waterproof flashlight, a whistle and any kind of pole with a flag or piece of light-colored cloth also should be taken. All passengers should be tied together to prevent separation until help arrives. Stay with the boat if any part of it remains above water. Most of the smaller boats have sufficient built-in

flotation to float some part of the craft above water even when the hull is full. Larger vessels may capture air and may float upside down.

If you need help, use your marine radio if you have one. A universally recognized small boat distress signal is made by slowly and repeatedly raising and lowering both arms outstretched at your sides. Sound distress signals are continuous sounding of a horn, bell, or whistle, and at night, rockets, flares or an automatic flashlight turned on and off to signal an SOS. If you stay with your boat, your chances of being found are a whole lot better, because it is a large object, even if partly submerged. If a person is floating or swimming alone, he is a mighty small

object and hard to see.

I have discussed serious problems on the water, but the chance of problems arising will be minimized if you keep your boat and engine in good repair. Frequent checks of your engine fuel and electrical systems pay off. Inspections for oil and other fuel leaks are also important, and are a must for inboard engines. There are not many places to get help out on the water, so take along a set of tools and the prescribed safety equipment. For a list of safety items, write the Boating Safety Officer, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104 or call (804) 367-1000.—William Antozzi, Boating Safety Officer

Upcoming Hunter Education Classes

Below are the hunter education classes that have been scheduled as of our press date. These 10-hour courses satisfy the mandatory hunter education requirement for all new hunters and those 12-15 years old. Contact the Richmond office of the Game Department at 804/367-1000 for more information and updates on any additional courses.

District 1—Central and South Central Virginia

Location: Baker Elementary School, Henrico County

Date: June 2, 9 & 16
Time: 6:30 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.
Contact: Belmont Park
Phone: 804/262-4728

District 3—Southwest Virginia

Location: Saltville High School, Smyth County

Date: July 9
Time: 8:00 a.m.
Contact: Ed Dempsey
Phone: 703/783-4860

District 5—North and Northeastern Virginia

Location: Lake Anna State Park Visitor Center, Spotsylvania County

Date: Sept. 9
Time: 7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.
Date: Sept. 10 & 11
Time: 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

District 6—Tidewater Virginia

Location: Western Branch Community Center, Chesapeake

Date: August 2, 3, & 4
Time: 6:00 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.
Contact: Allen Crowder
Phone: (804) 421-7151

Location: Western Branch Community Center, Chesapeake

Date: August 9, 10, & 11
Time: 6:00 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.
Contact: Allen Crowder
Phone: (804) 421-7151

Letters

Shooting "Targets?"

I am writing in reference to the article that appeared in the March 1988 issue entitled "A Respect for the Sport." I do agree with Mr. Gooch that you must treat a gun with respect and be responsible with one around yourself and others. I am all for the new law that requires new hunters and those under 16 years of age to take the hunter safety course. But, the article showed a bad example of another important aspect of respecting the sport, and that is respecting the game. I am talking in reference to the helpless sparrows and black birds that were used for "targets." That's what clay pigeons are for.

I feel that in order to respect that sport, respect for the game should be held as high as that of the gun.

Tim Sharff
Richmond

April Issue

I thoroughly enjoyed your April edition of *Virginia Wildlife* devoted to fishing.

Why don't you have an article on the 10 best trout streams in Virginia?

Joseph J. Jackson
Hampton

Land Rights

I read your good article on the Editor's Page in the April issue of *Virginia Wildlife* with great interest. Our so-called right to do what we will with our own land is not something the average foreigner or even our own forefathers would understand. It seems to be a perversion of our heritage of plentiful land and freedom by post World War II development pressures and speculative real estate interests. I read somewhere that if you took all the people in the world and put them in the U.S., you would have just slightly more

people per square mile than in Great Britain, where the rights of others to enjoy rural land is protected.

William G. Prime
Warrenton

Farmer's Objection

I as a lifelong country resident, I would like to take extreme objection to your April editorial.

Let's start off with your friends with the \$200,000 house, a couple of dogs that are never chained, etc.

This type usually has a "farmette" that has a perfectly manicured lawn, overgrazed field for the horses and clean fence rows, which adds up to absolutely no place for the wildlife to live that they claim they love so much. They usually have two or three Irish setters, golden retrievers or labs who run loose all the time destroying quail, turkey, and grouse nests and young rabbits and fawns, not to mention domestic livestock of area farmers.

Also, if they really are concerned about wildlife as they claim why didn't they take the \$200,000 they spent on the house and spend \$50,000 on a house and \$150,000 on more land for a wildlife area?

Also who is responsible for the break up of their neighboring tracts of land? They are, of course. When suburbanites start moving into an agricultural area, many things happen that start the wheels turning against the area remaining undeveloped.

The first is property "values" start to go up. This, of course, means taxes go up, but the value of crops or animals the farmer is producing don't go up.

The city types then start complaining about noise, smell, etc. that is part of any agricultural area.

Also, the dogs of these city types as I mentioned before really play havoc with livestock, and God help you if

you shoot one killing your animals. Whereas, if you shot a dog that was killing livestock that belonged to another farmer, he'd probably thank you.

So in the end, the farmer gives up fighting "the wheels of progress" and sells his farm and either retires or moves to an undeveloped area to start over farming. And you want to restrict the land use at this point to prevent him from getting top dollar for his land? Shame!

If you really want to do something constructive, tell you city friends to stay in the city and leave the agricultural acres alone. Their "farmettes" are the cause of the cancer that is destroying our rural areas and wildlife habitat.

Also, there is probably nothing more irksome to farmers than to have someone buy 10 acres and act as though they own the surrounding 10,000 acres.

Gary Burnett
Ruckersville

Trout Fishing Blues

Well, as another trout opening arrives, I must take pen in hand to express my concern over the deterioration of trout fishing in the state over the past few years. I just finished my state tax return, and as usual, I made a contribution of \$20 to the Virginia Nongame Wildlife Program.

My four sons and I have been fishing for the past 10-15 years at Elizabeth Furnace in Front Royal and on the Robinson and Rose Rivers in Syria. Both areas have deteriorated tremendously over the past several years. It used to be a wonderful experience to go with the boys for a couple of days of fishing, but now it is no longer fun. I subscribe to the *Virginia Wildlife* magazine and read all the articles about trout fishing in Virginia and

Letters

look forward to the stockings in the March issue. I believe we are all spending a lot of money for nothing, because the trout are gone at opening. Last year my son-in-law came in for opening day. Our licenses together cost over \$100 and we caught two trout all day. That is pathetic. If the trout are in fact being stocked, they sure never make it to opening day. As a result, the boys ended up with most of the other fishermen at the trout pond. You may have to change the Robinson and Rose to pay-as-you-go fishing, also.

Before trout fishing is completely gone, I suggest you might want to keep a closer eye on these areas. It has been getting bad, but last year was the worst ever. It is really a sad ending to what use to be such an enjoyable sport.

F.W. Gerow

Your complaint of poor success on opening day last year was fairly universal. Like you, most anglers blamed their sparse creels on either reduced stocking by the Department or excessive preseason poaching. In fact, neither was the case. Trout stockings for 1987 were 10% higher than in 1986 and a shortened preseason stocking period resulted in tighter law enforcement. Although trout were abundant in stocked streams, I will agree that creels were unusually light. The reason appeared to be a sharp drop in stream temperature during the week preceding the opening. With melting snows in the mountains and unseasonably low temperatures, water temperatures dropped to the mid-thirties for the first day—a good 10 degrees below normal. Although trout will feed at such temperatures, their metabolic rate is reduced and all activity, including feeding, is drastically slowed. For those anglers who remained to fish the next few weeks, fishing success was excellent under uncrowded conditions.

As far as opening day for 1988 was concerned, streams were well stocked and heavily patrolled. Hopefully, Mother

Nature will cooperate to make this year more successful than last.

Larry O. Mohn
District Fisheries Biologist

Send Me No More

This will not be one of the typical letters usually seen on your editorial pages. I'm notifying you to cancel my subscription to *Virginia Wildlife* while I, ironically, must thank you at the same time for making me aware that the real use of my contribution to *Virginia Wildlife* is conservation to benefit hunters, primarily. (At least that's the impression I receive from reading the articles in the magazine.)

My pleasure at the March issue's cover in which the photographer captured the wonderful, absurd dignity of the turkey gobbler was immediately dimmed by the realization that the reason an animal appears on the cover is to notify hunters that the season is open. And the magazine's contents support my theory; the complete issue is devoted to methods of hunting the gobbler. One is certainly given the impression that the purpose of the magazine is promoting hunting; that must inevitably raise questions as to the objectives of *Virginia Wildlife*.

Surely these birds are not so numerous or so threatening as to need artificial control. I walk in country fields in Virginia as often as possible and I have yet to experience the thrill of seeing these extraordinary birds in their natural habitat, though I have heard men talk of a time when they were so numerous it was impossible not to see them. I would love to see these "flocks" and "gangs" that "cut a wide swath" through trees.

From now on, my contribution will benefit organizations that operate on the premise that we conserve to benefit all humans and animals, as much as

possible, not just a very small select group of humans. Many of us would welcome the chance to exist peacefully with nature's remarkable inhabitants.

I notice on the informative back page article by Jerry Via that the bald eagle population last year numbered at 73 breeding pairs. I can't push away a nagging question, "How soon will the portrait of the eagle on the cover of *Wildlife* signal that the season is open?" I hope this doesn't happen and that Jerry Via's comment regarding the eagle could also apply to protection of many more animals. "Perhaps as the population of bald eagles in Virginia increases and more people observe its habits, there will be a greater understanding of commitment to the protection of future eagle generations." I think I'm hearing the wisdom of a true conservationist.

I realize I could specifically contribute to nongame wildlife. But that won't help make it possible for me to enjoy seeing wild gobblers, will it?

Kay Glymph
Burke

Virginia Wildlife is produced by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and as such, is supported solely by the hunters and fishermen of this state with their license revenues. It is a shame that the general public does not realize how much they owe the hunters and fishermen of this nation, and how quick would be their apology to this group of conservationists if they only knew their history. We challenge you to do a little investigation into the role sportsmen have played in the conservation of wildlife in this nation before you make sharp accusations against a group of men and women who should be thanked for the keen foresight and unselfish sacrifices they made 50 years ago, and continue to make to this day for the wildlife of this nation. I believe it will be a humbling experience.—Editor

Virginia's Wildlife

The Chipmunk

by
John Pagels
photo by
Gregory Scott

Leaves rustled, a twig snapped. Quiet. More rustling. Another mountaintop picnic with special outdoor attractions. Was it a gray squirrel? A grouse? No, it was too close and still too hidden to be anything but a chipmunk. A blur on a log and suddenly a face-off at ten feet—my face full of pasta salad and its cheeks bulging from acorns. The chipmunk trilled a series of “chips” as it scrambled into its burrow beside a stump.

It's not unusual that the chipmunk is a diurnal species; among our squirrels, only flying squirrels are nocturnal. In light of its daytime activity, however, what may seem strange at first is the chipmunk's bright, striped coloration. But in the mixed shadows and sunbeams of the forest floor, it's those multicolored stripes that turn rustling leaves into quiet leaves, and the blur on a log becomes a bump on a log. Indeed, there is evidence that the chipmunk is most active on bright days, and I think we could safely assume that part of that is more than just trying to keep warm; the chipmunk is instinctively maximizing the role of its protective coloration.

The eastern chipmunk, *Tamias striatus*, is most at home in or near deciduous woodlands, and it is rare to absent in southeastern portions of the state. Called a “ground squirrel” by some, it spends much time foraging on the ground, but also will use elevated items, such as stumps, tree trunks and rock piles, particularly for observation and vocalization posts. Or, the elevated structures serve to hide burrow openings below. Rarely does the chipmunk nest in trees.

Chipmunks have at least four vocalizations in their repertoire, ranging from a low pitched, nearly turkey-like *cuk* to the *chip-trill* given during an escape rush. All seem to be alarm signals.

An opportunistic feeder, in the warm season the chipmunk's diet ranges from fungi to frogs and small mammals. Most of late summer and fall is spent in filling its underground pantry. Notably, seeds, acorns, cherry pits and other items are gathered that it carries in its often crammed cheek pouches. The food caches in their sometimes extensive burrow systems provide nourishment not only for the winter, but also for the next spring and early summer, or until other items are again available.

And chipmunks have another mechanism for surviving the cold period—hibernation. During much of fall and winter, they are in and out of various degrees of “deep sleep” or torpor that may last as little as 24 hours to a week at a time. When in hibernation, the metabolic rate of a chipmunk may be less than 15 percent of the activity level. Chipmunks are sometimes active on mild winter days, and following a spring snowfall, it's not unusual to see the snow around burrow openings matted by their activity.

Chipmunks have a rather unsocial social system—the basic unit of which is a single individual occupying a burrow system. That's a rather uncomplimentary description and a lonesome one, but it works! The system helps insure that their habitat will not be over-exploited. Their home ranges broadly overlap, but a central core area or territory is actively defended by threat postures and occasional chases. Of course, the behavior associated with maintaining the territories accounts for only a small percentage of a chipmunk's time and energy expenditure, otherwise why have such a system in the first place?

Only in the early spring and mid-summer mating periods are adult males and females together. At that time, dominance/subordinate relationships are especially notable; generally older and larger males are dominant, and if only two or three other males are around, the dominant male succeeds in his quest for a mate. But, the system can sometimes break down. Apparently, if too large a number of males are after the same female, for example, seven or eight, the dominant male might spend so much time chasing rivals away that none of the ensuing young will be able to call him a father. Litters of four to five young are born after a gestation period of about 30 days, and the juveniles emerge from the burrow sometime after five weeks. About two weeks later, their now intolerant mother forces them away to establish their own home, often within the old home range.

By the way, the word “chipmunk” is of American Indian origin. Look it up! Curiously, just a few words away you'll find the word Chippendale. Hmm!? □

John Pagels is a mammologist at Virginia Commonwealth University.



National Fishing & Safe Boating Week

June 5-12, 1988

